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117th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 13 September 2016, 11 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Agenda item 120 (*continued*)

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (A/70/1003)

Draft resolution (A/70/1003, paragraph 67)

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly considered agenda item 119 and agenda item 120 in a joint debate at its 45th plenary meeting, on 3 November 2015.

It is fitting that the last draft resolution to be considered by the General Assembly at this session is that related to the continued revitalization of the work of the Assembly. I congratulate members of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly on delivering yet another landmark draft resolution. In particular, allow me to extend my most sincere gratitude to Ambassador Vladimir Drobnjak of Croatia and Ambassador Wilfried Emvula of Namibia, co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group, who have so ably conducted the Working Group's discussions and complex negotiations.

The draft resolution contains a number of milestone reforms that will continue to reinvigorate the work of the General Assembly as we move into its eighth decade. It points to the critical need to continue to strengthen the role and authority of the General Assembly and to improve its working methods. During what has already been a momentous year for the process to appoint the next chief administrator of the Organization, the draft resolution continues to address the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads.

It is, however, in relation to the transparency and accountability of the President of the General Assembly and the Office of the President where this year's draft resolution makes its greatest mark. From the beginning of my term as President, I have placed the highest priority on this issue, particularly in terms of how I and members of my Office discharged our responsibilities.

It is with much gratitude to the Member States that I warmly welcome the steps this draft resolution proposes to strengthen the Office of the President. Most notably, it includes an oath of office which I know my successor looks forward to taking later today, and a code of conduct that will also apply to staff members of the Office. There are also a number of other measures in the draft resolution that, when taken together, form a substantive package of actions to strengthen the integrity of the Office of the President and, by extension, the integrity and legitimacy of the General Assembly and the United Nations itself. It includes mandated recordkeeping, financial disclosure requirements, the vetting of Trust Fund contributions and comprehensive induction briefings for the staff of the Office of the President.

This draft resolution is yet another example of effective, timely and decisive action on the part of the General Assembly. As my time as President very swiftly

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draws to a close, I am left with a sense of great optimism as to what we in the United Nations can achieve when we work together. In particular, I am optimistic about the fact that the General Assembly — the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations — continues to increase its capacity to effectively tackle today's many global challenges in the areas of peace, human rights and sustainable development.

We shall now proceed to consider the draft resolution contained in paragraph 67 of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Abelian (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): The present statement is made in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. By adopting the draft resolution contained in paragraph 67 of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (A/70/1003), entitled "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly", the General Assembly in paragraph 64 of the draft resolution would request the Secretary-General

> "to submit, in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019, proposals to review the budget allocation of the Office of the President of the General Assembly in accordance with existing procedures and bearing in mind the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the functioning of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, and in this connection looks forward to considering such proposals during the main part of its seventy-second session".

The recommendations contained in paragraph 68 of the report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the functioning of the Office of the President of the General Assembly state, in sub-paragraph (k), that

> "[t]he Secretary-General should consider proposing the establishment of an additional P-5 post in the Office, which could be filled for a duration of up to five years. The incumbent of the post would manage the continuity and transfer of knowledge between Presidents and sessions, as well as assist in the preparation of the President's end-of-presidency report and in the handover briefing recommended for the President and/or the Office".

In sub-paragraph (n), the report states that

> "[t]he Secretary-General should propose that programme budget resources be allocated for handover and overlap costs for a limited duration during the three-month transition period, in order to maximize the use of the transition period for incoming Presidents".

Should the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution contained in paragraph 67 of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, there would be programme budget implications for the biennium 2018-2019 as follows: $275,200 for the establishment of a P-5 post as recommended in document A/70/783, paragraph 68 (k), estimated using the vacancy factor of 50 per cent; and $178,800 in general temporary assistance corresponding to an overlap period of one month each year for four positions: two D-2s, one D-1 and one P-5 for handover and overlap requirements to assist outgoing and incoming Presidents of the General Assembly.

Accordingly, the adoption of the draft resolution contained in paragraph 67 of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly would give rise to additional resource requirements amounting to approximately $454,000 for the biennium 2018-2019. These requirements would be dealt with within the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution entitled "Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly", contained in paragraph 67 of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt it?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 70/305).

The President: We shall now hear statements after the adoption of the draft resolution.

I give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Van Den Akker (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

The European Union and its member States welcome today's adoption of resolution 70/305 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting and for your engagement in the revitalization process. We owe further thanks to the co-Chairs, His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Drobnjak and His Excellency Mr. Wilfried Emvula, and their teams, who very ably led the negotiation process. Without their personal involvement, wisdom, good sense of humour and extraordinary patience, these results would not have been possible. We also thank the Secretariat, in particular Mr. Georg Zeiner, and other colleagues from the Secretariat engaged in the process for their useful involvement. We would like to highlight the constructive atmosphere that prevailed throughout the negotiations and thank all the negotiating partners for their engagement in revitalizing the General Assembly.

The resolution we have just adopted contains some significant new elements and would not have been possible without the flexibility shown by all Member States engaged in the negotiations. The resolution can be seen as another milestone in strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President. In particular, this includes the release of detailed information on the finances, official travel, staffing and activities of the Office of the President; a standardized format for the written hand-over summary of best practices and lessons learned, to be transmitted to the President's successor and made available to Member States; the preservation of records and institutional memory during the President's term in office by using existing recordkeeping and archiving facilities; new efforts to create equal opportunities for men and women and to ensure a gender balance throughout the United Nations system and in the Office of the President; and the obtaining of information on the sources of funding and staffing of the Office of the President. Another element worth highlighting is the agreement on the provision of financial disclosures on the assumption and completion of the President's duties, in line with the existing United Nations financial disclosure programme. In addition we agreed that all contributions have to be vetted through the United Nations Ethics Office and for non in-kind contributions to be channeled through the United Nations Trust Fund.

Particular progress was also made in other areas, such as the establishment of a code of ethics to be observed by the President, including the members of his or her Office, and of an individual oath of office to be taken by him or her. This is complemented by the decision to enhance cooperation and interaction between the Permanent Missions to the United Nations and the Secretariat through an interactive and comprehensive dialogue. All these, and other elements agreed upon in the resolution, will ensure a more favourable public image of the United Nations in general and the Office of the President.

On 18 July, the Council of the European Union adopted its priorities for the seventy-first session of the General Assembly. These priorities reaffirm the commitment of the European Union to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and recognize the need for the reform and reinvigoration of the global governance systems, of which the revitalization of the General Assembly is a key component. It is with this in mind that I wish to signal our readiness to remain constructively engaged in this process.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Ms. Lind (Estonia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group, which is a cross-regional group comprised of the following 20 five small and mid-size countries seeking to improve the working methods of the Security Council: Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay.

We warmly welcome the adoption of resolution 70/305 today by consensus, and we would like to thank President Lykketoft for his leadership, as well as the tireless co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representatives of Croatia and Namibia, for their excellent work, creativity and continued dedication. We also extend warm thanks to all of the teams and the Secretariat.

The ACT group would like to offer a few comments on the cluster dealing with the selection and appointment of the next Secretary-General and other executive heads addressed in the resolution.

We are pleased that the Ad Hoc Working Group reached a consensual agreement to complement the historic resolution 69/321 with the provisions in this year's resolution, affirming the achievements made so far. We have received a clear overview of the candidates that were submitted for the position of the Secretary-General and pariticipated in informal dialgoues with them — a process that we believe will and should become the norm in the future. Since the new session will start today and the selection process is not only ongoing but reaching its final stage, we are glad that the resolution just adopted requests the President of the Assembly at its seventy-first session to actively support the process.

The ACT group continues to advocate for the best qualified person who will emerge from a fair and transparent selection process, to be appointed by the General Assembly as the next Secretary-General. We are therefore pleased that clear and precise qualifications and criteria have been included also in this year's resolution. Furthermore, in the highly debated paragraph 45, dealing with senior appointments, the long-standing positions of the ACT group are well reflected. We have been advocating for the Secretary-General to exercise independence in the selection of senior officials, as well as respect for the highest standards and efficiency in these appointments, while ensuring equal and fair distribution based on gender-balance and as wide of a geographical base as possible.

The ACT group would like to see the General Assembly continue playing the rightful role foreseen for it under the Charter, including its prerogative to draft a final resolution for the appointment of the Secretary-General. We hope that the final phase of the selection will be as encouraging as the whole process has been so far. In this regard, the ACT group, concurring with the views expressed by the President, calls once again upon the Security Council to live up to the expectations of the general membership concerning the new standard of openness and transparency on the selection process and the results of the straw polls.

In conclusion, allow me to sincerely thank President Lykketoft on behalf of our group for his excellent work in bringing new norms of transparency to the United Nations and to wish much success to the incoming President and, indeed, to the whole General Assembly for a sucessful conclusion to this selection process.

Mr. Sobral Duarte (Brazil): Brazil welcomes the adoption by consensus of another breakthrough resolution on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly (resolution 70/305). We would like to thank Ambassador Vladimir Drobnjak of Croatia and Ambassador Wilfred Emvula of Namibia for their excellent work on a second consecutive year as co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly.

As is well known, last year's resolution 69/321 introduced important changes to the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General. These changes — in particular the holding of informal dialogues between the candidates and the General Assembly — have contributed so far to an unprecedented degree of transparency and democratic interaction in the process for the next Secretary-General. The resolution that was just adopted, after 10 months of intense discussions and negotiations, reflects a similar commitment to a more inclusive and democratic decision-making process at the United Nations.

From our perspective, the advances introduced in paragraphs 44 and 45 of this year's resolution deserve special mention. Paragraph 44, among other points, stresses that

> "the process of appointments to senior posts by the Secretary-General within the Organization should be inclusive and transparent".

Paragraph 45, for its part, stresses that as

> "a general rule, there should be no monopoly on senior posts in the United Nations system by nationals of any State or group of States".

Ironically, part of these breakthrough innovations — the prescription that there should be no monopolies in the senior posts of the Organization — came from previously agreed consensus language. Resolutions 46/232 of 1992 and 51/241 of 1997, both adopted without a vote, established this principle after the end of the Cold War. The importance of reaffirming this notion at this time should be highlighted. With the election of a new Secretary-General by the Assembly upon us, it is more than necessary that this principle should guide his or her appointments from the very outset. Improving the functioning of the Secretariat is a vital part of the reform and revitalization of the General Assembly and

of the United Nations as a whole, and there is no better moment to recommit to this idea than now.

This year's resolution also brings important innovations in other areas, especially regarding the President and his or her Office. After 70 years, a long overdue code of ethics has been established, as has an oath of office for the President. In addition, measures such as the provision of financial disclosures by the Presidents of the General Assembly, vetting all contributions to the Trust Fund in support of the Office of the President by the United Nations Ethics Office, as well as making available resources to the Presidents from their date of election, will contribute to the observance of the highest standards of transparency and ethics and will represent a positive contribution to fortify the activity of the Office of the President.

On other possible ways to improve and strengthen the work of the President of the General Assembly, however, the resolution has fallen short of expectations, especially as regards the long-overdue need to provide the Office with meaningful resources from the regular budget. Brazil remains committed to the revitalization of the General Assembly and the reaffirmation of its central role as the most democratic and representative decision-making body of the Organization, as well as to ensuring a more active role for the General Assembly in nominating the Secretary-General, in accordance with article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations. The General Assembly cannot be a rubber-stamping Assembly.

Finally, as this is the last resolution to be adopted during this session, allow me to congratulate the President on the excellent work he has done as the President of the General Assembly at its seventieth session. Among the many important initiatives the President has conducted during his term of office, let me single out his active participation in guaranteeing a democratic selection of the next Secretary-General by organizing the informal dialogues or hearings, as well as the creative town-hall meeting with the candidates that was covered by the TV network Al Jazeera. Absent his commitment, we may not have come this far.

Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the co-facilitators, Ambassador Vladimir Drobjnak and Ambassador Wilfried Emvula, for their tireless work, and President Lykketoft for his enormous efforts to reach the point where we find ourselves today. As we did last year in this same forum, this year I wish, on behalf of my delegation and my country, to extend our gratitude to President Lykketoft for the way he has, throughout these intense 10 months of negotiations, steered this ship of ours safely to port towards the revitalization the work of the General Assembly.

For a number of years, criticism has abounded at the lack of consensus within the Organization and the lack of concrete action taken to adapt it to the global challenges of an increasingly turbulent world. We have come a long way, but it has become ever more clear that, working together as the international community of States Members of the United Nations, we have achieved fruitful results with a view to making its principal organ more inclusive, more democratic and more transparent. I would highlight three key aspects

First, thanks to resolution 70/305, adopted today, we now have a more inclusive General Assembly. The resolution highlights the need for the United Nations to strike a gender and geographical balance. Let me be frank in saying that this is no mean feat, particularly in light of resolution 69/321 of 2015, wheb we were able to achieve a high participation of female candidates for the post of Secretary-General.

Secondly, thanks to resolution 70/305, we now have a more democratic General Assembly. Between us, we have managed to fine-tune the procedures established between the Assembly and the other organs — including the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the different components of the United Nations system — so that the sum of its parts can function more efficiently. I want to draw particular attention to the appeal made in the resolution for more consistent alignment between the General Assembly and the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), which perhaps constitutes the most significant achievement of our times in the area of development.

Thirdly, through this resolution, we have managed to create not just a more transparent General Assembly, but a much more transparent Organization, with the adoption of the code of ethics and the oath of office of the President of the General Assembly so that the President's actions are more visible for the rest of the world.

As ever, it is clear that there is still a long way to go, but to that end the momentum created by the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly offers the optimal space for

pursuing the right path. Strengthening the United Nations is essential to the ambitious agenda that we have proposed. It must evolve from being a mere aspiration to becoming a reality in the next 15 years. The orderly, transparent and efficient work of the General Assembly is essential to that end.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): On behalf of my dear friend, Ambassador Wilfried Emvula of Namibia and myself, I wish to express our sincere appreciation for all the constructive cooperation and creative assistance that we have received from Member States in the previous months. It has been a privilege to continue co-chairing the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly at the seventieth session as well, and we can most certainly say that resolution 70/305, which we have just adopted, is truly our common success.

The resolution before us is not only an important step forward in increasing the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the General Assembly and the Office of its President; it is also a triumph of consensus. It serves as the best example of what we all can achieve when we work together in the spirit of seeking a common goal and creative compromise. It is also, in more ways than one, a continuation of the milestone resolution 69/321.

There is still ample room for improvement within the framework of the revitalization of the General Assembly, but with the adoption of today's resolution, building on resolution 69/321, one can say with confidence that profound creative improvements have been accomplished, especially in the field of the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and the strengthening the Office of the President. The fact that the annexes to the resolution will be immediately annexed to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly speaks for itself about the significance and reach of our action.

We want to thank the Secretariat, and in particular Mr. Georg Zeiner, for their highly professional, competent and valuable assistance and resourcefulness.

Last, but definitely not least, we thank the President of Assembly at its seventieth session, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, and his team for all the confidence entrusted in the co-Chairs and the efficient support provided whenever and wherever needed in the course of this challenging endeavour.

In a few hours, the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session will take the oath of office, thereby beginning the implementation of what we have achieved through our hard work and adopted today. We are confident that other important provisions of this far-reaching document will also be put to practical use very soon. It was indeed an honour to co-chair this groundbreaking process. We thank everyone once again.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus completed its consideration of agenda item 120.

Agenda item 130 (*continued*)

Global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers

The Acting President: Members will recall that, at the Assembly's 116th plenary meeting, on 9 September, delegations expressed their views in favour of as well as against the inclusion of this item on the draft agenda of the Assembly's seventy-first session.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): This issue is of interest to every State, whether it be one of destination or origin. This global phenomenon must be tackled by all of us, and all of us must work to find ways to solve it. We must be objective in examining every one of its aspects and effects all over the world, as well as its chief causes in the Middle East, particularly terrorism, the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab territories and the military invasion of some parts of the region, as well as unilateral economic sanctions.

Agenda item 130 focuses only on the area of the Mediterranean basin and Syrians in particular, ignoring the tragedies of Yemeni, Libyan and Afghan refugees. Many States Members of our Organization have interfered militarily in their countries. Based on data from Eurostat, the numbers of Syrian refugees and migrants do not exceed 20 per cent of asylum seekers, meaning that 80 per cent of those entering Europe are of other Asian or African origin. No one is willing to admit to the political and non-humanitarian motives behind the insistence on focusing on Syrian asylum seekers in this agenda item.

While we appreciate the sincere efforts of some States to host Syrian asylum seekers, we object to

their being used as a political ploy and to efforts to link them to terrorism. The international community should shoulder its responsibilities for dealing with the migration of the tens of thousands of foreign mercenary fighters travelling to join the terrorist groups active in Syria. In Syria, we are saddened by the flight of any Syrian seeking asylum, and we hope that all our citizens will eventually return to their schools, universities, villages and cities and will work side by side with their compatriots to rebuild Syria once more.

The existence of asylum seekers makes it incumbent on the international community to put pressure on States that support terrorism to end that support forthwith, and on States that have imposed unilateral economic sanctions on Syria — causing economic paralysis and the destruction of infrastructure — to lift those sanctions. A peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict requires an end to external interference. Based on Article 14 of the Charter of the United Nations, we therefore urge that item 130 either not be included on the agenda of the Assembly at its seventy-first session or that the emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers be deleted.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We believe that the General Assembly's consideration of the problem of irregular migration in the Mediterranean region should be broad and inclusive, taking into account every attendant aspect, including that of human rights, as well as of countries of origin, transit and destination. To highlight the Syrian factor in this issue seems inappropriate and politicized, particularly since we are all aware that the scale of migrants flowing through Libya and the Mediterranean basin near is now so threatening that it required special Security Council resolutions and a report of the Secretary-General (A/70/59), whose conclusions are not encouraging. As we know, it is precisely in the southern Mediterranean that the European Union has launched a special military operation, Operation Sophia. We therefore propose that the reference to Syrian asylum seekers be deleted from item 130, which would allow us to avoid unnecessary division within the General Assembly.

Mr. Louis (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of my delegation, I would first like to warmly congratulate the President on the leadership he has shown in steering the work of the General Assembly at its seventieth session, which is closing today.

I would like to focus the attention of the Assembly on the scale of the tragedy of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin. This is one of the most pressing humanitarian situations facing the world today, which has been getting exponentially worse for more than a year. Furthermore, aware of the urgency of the situation, at a General Assembly meeting held on 20 November 2015, the President of the Assembly was already delivering a message of alarm, stating that

> "[s]ince January, more than 880,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe ... more than 3,500 of them have already died on the route this year". (*A/70/PV.59, p. 1*)

The plight of millions of displaced men, women and children refugees, Syrian or otherwise, must appeal to the conscience of the international community. In that regard, the collective action of the international community is necessary, and indeed indispensable, especially given the timely high-level summit on the large movements of refugees and migrants, to be held 19 September on the margins of the seventy-first regular session of the General Assembly.

The delegation of Haiti is very sensitive to and concerned by the situation of the massive displacement of refugees and migrants, particularly Syrian asylum seekers in the Mediterranean Basin, but also all displaced persons in general. Therefore, we are in favour of including agenda item 130, aptly named "Global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers", in the agenda of the seventy-first regular session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): I would like to underline my delegation's strong position in favour of retaining item 130 on the agenda of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, as it is. We find it deeply regrettable that the merely procedural deferral of this agenda item is being challenged. The magnitude of the large-scale movement of the migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean basin needs no further explanation. The number of Syrian refugees, 4.8 million people in total, spreading out from Brazil to Australia, speaks for itself. At a time when we feel disheartened to see so many displaced trying to survive, we should not question the relevance of the United Nations addressing the tragedy.

Next week, our leaders will come together to address the issue of migrants and refugees in New York.

In the wake of these gatherings, we must refrain from being divided on an issue on which we should be most united. We are confident that Member States will stand firm in their commitments towards those who would look to the United Nations for assistance and support by retaining item 130 in the agenda of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly as it is.

Ms. Velichko (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The problem of refugees and migrants is of a global nature and should be considered holistically. On 19 September, the General Assembly will hold the high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. That event will be substantively unlike any other event held thus far in the United Nations on that theme. We will adopt a global strategy for refugees and a road map for migrants through outcome documents. There is also a subsequent plan to hold an international conference on migrants in order to adopt a global strategy on that issue.

These events reflect the fact that, in the short and mid terms, we have created a solid foundation for the profound and comprehensive consideration and exploration of ways to solve problems related to migrants and refugees, including Syrians. In that respect, we do not think it appropriate to include item 130 in the agenda of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly. A separate agenda item on that topic could lead to the duplication of work in the Assembly, expanding our already hefty agenda, and resulting in the irrational spending of the United Nations budget.

Mr. Chu Guang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China has listened to the statements made by the representatives of Belarus and the Russian Federation, and we thank them for their positions. We support the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation. We believe that the second part of agenda item 130, "with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers", should be deleted.

Ms. Pritchard (Canada): There are many situations that warrant the attention of the General Assembly. However, the wide range of situations that are before us should not lead us to ignore the issue surrounding global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers.

Several delegations have already pointed out that it remains an issue of not only regional but also global concern, and it is our view that to remove that item from the agenda of the General Assembly at this time would send entirely the wrong message. It is for that reason that we support the inclusion of that item and would like to see it on the agenda of the seventy-first session.

Mr. Dibaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): The Islamic Republic of Iran underlines the importance of addressing the agony and suffering of refugees in a humane and respectful manner. In fact, Iran is no stranger to the issue at hand, as for several decades, it has single-handedly hosted one of the largest refugee populations in the world. However, singling out one situation among many does not seem helpful in addressing the subject. We reiterate our understanding that the issue of refugees should be considered in a holistic manner, under a relevant General Assembly agenda item, without undertaking a selective approach. It is for that reason that my delegation cannot support the inclusion of that agenda item in the draft agenda of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Poveda Brito (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, aware of the importance of considering a topic of such critical importance to the current global and humanitarian agenda as the tragedy of the refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean basin, asserts that it deserves a comprehensive treatment encompassing all geographical areas that suffer from that phenomenon, without focusing on any single region or country.

As such, our position on the issue will continue to advance a vision from the South that advocates the ongoing creation of a positive narrative on the topic of refugees and migrants and does not criminalize them by considering them to be the root causes of phenomena such as fomenting armed conflicts, but rather promotes economic and social development and overcoming poverty as structural mechanisms for addressing that global issue. We therefore support the Russian Federation's proposal.

Ms. Al-Temimi (Qatar): We want to echo the statement just made by our colleague from Turkey. This issue continues to be one of great global concern. That is why we support the inclusion of agenda item 130 in the agenda of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Barro (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Given the continuous flow of migrants through the Mediterranean Basin, Senegal is in favour of the inclusion of agenda

item 130 in the agenda of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly.

Ms. Blake (United States of America): The United States wishes to express its full support for retaining agenda item 130 as it is currently on the agenda of the General Assembly and for including it in the draft agenda of its seventy-first session. As several other delegations have stated, including Haiti's, that remains, as ever, a relevant challenge. We would strongly encourage all Member States to consider its relevancy, given the gravity of the situation of the displaced, not only in Syria but elsewhere, so as to ensure that we have an opportunity as an organ to continue discussing something that remains a timely and important matter.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): My country is, and has been for years, one of the countries at the forefront in the migrant and refugee crisis that affects the Mediterranean region. Of course, while war is a dimension of issues pertaining to migrants and refugees, we can speak particularly about what is happening in the Mediterranean. Taking into account that we are approaching the important Summit to be held on 19 September, we think that it would send the wrong message not to include this item in the draft agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. We therefore firmly support its inclusion.

Mr. Oussihamou (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): My delegation firmly supports the inclusion of agenda item 130 in the draft agenda of the upcoming session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Minami (Japan): Japan would like to support the proposal regarding the retention of agenda item 130, entitled "Global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers", in the draft agenda of the General Assembly of its seventy-first session.

The international community still faces human tragedies as a consequence of massive irregular movements of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean basin. Given the complexity and seriousness of its root causes, this issue requires continuous global attention. Therefore, we need to discuss it intensively, before and after the Summit to be held on 19 September.

Ms. Duncan Villalobos (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica calls for retaining this item of the agenda. We believe that discussions must continue to be held in this forum.

Mr. Fornell (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Ecuador calls for item on refugees and migrants to be included in the draft agenda of the General Assembly, without politicization, double standards or singling out a specific country. Ecuador therefore supports including the item on the draft agenda, but without the reference to Syria.

Mr. Orozco Barrera (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation believes that it is important to retain this item as it stands on the draft agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session: "Global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers".

Mr. Cepero Aguilar (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): More than 1 million asylum seekers crossed the Mediterranean in 2015. According to the International Organization for Migration, 32 per cent of migrants who reportedly died or went missing in their attempt to reach Europe via the Mediterranean came from Western, Central and Southern Africa; 22 per cent from the Middle East and South Asia; 10 per cent from the Horn of Africa; 1 per cent from North Africa; and 35 per cent from areas unknown. Those statistics show that the use of the Mediterranean as a passageway to reach Europe is not exclusive to any particular country. The singling out of any one country with regard to this item will only contribute to an unrealistic analysis of the phenomenon in general.

In conclusion, Cuba supports the proposal made by the Russian delegation.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The opinions expressed by the delegations of certain countries, including their insistence on dealing with the tragedy of migrants and refugees with a specific focus on Syrians alone and their rejection of the proposal made by the Russian Federation to retain that part of item 130, which focuses on a global awareness of the tragedy of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin while deleting the phrase specifically focusing on Syrian asylum seekers, demonstrate that there are Governments involved in this crisis and in exploiting the suffering of migrants and refugees in order to pressure the Syrian Government by exacerbating the humanitarian situation in Syria.

My delegation would therefore like the matter concerning agenda item 130 put to a recorded vote.

Ms. Danish (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would like to retain item 130 in the draft agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session in connection with the huge movements of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean basin and encourage all members to support retaining this item.

The Acting President: Members will recall that, at its 116th plenary meeting, on 9 September, delegations expressed their views in favour as well as against the inclusion of this item in the draft agenda of the seventy-first session.

In view of the objections made, the General Assembly will now proceed to a recorded vote on the proposal that agenda item 130 be included in the draft agenda of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Latvia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay

Against:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Iran (Islamic Republic of), Lesotho, Nicaragua, Russian Federation, Syrian Arab Republic, United Republic of Tanzania, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Zimbabwe

Abstaining:

Bangladesh, Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Viet Nam

The General Assembly decided to include agenda item 130 in the draft of agenda of its seventy-first session by 82 votes to 9, with 21 abstentions.

[Subsequently, the delegation of Albania informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour, the delegation of Cuba informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote against, and the delegation of Tanzania informed the Secretariat that it had intended to abstain.]

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We welcome all the sincere and dedicated efforts to address the issue of Syrian refugees. However, including the item as it is, focusing on global awareness of the tragedies of only the Syrian refugees in the Mediterranean Basin, who represent only 20 per cent of all asylum seekers in Europe, we believe that there are doubts about the appropriateness of including this item on the draft agenda. Therefore, we requested a vote and voted against the inclusion of this item on the draft agenda. On this occasion, I should like to express our delegation's appreciation to those countries that voted for the inclusion of this item because of the global nature of this phenomenon and whose thinking was not confined to the Syrian phenomenon.

Mr. Gafoor (Singapore): Singapore voted in favour of including this item on the General Assembly's agenda, as we respect the right of delegations to propose agenda items for inclusion for discussion in the plenary. Furthermore, we see merit in retaining this agenda item for further discussion in the Assembly at its seventy-first session. The issue of irregular migration in the Mediterranean basin remains an issue of concern to the international community, as it affects many innocent people, including children. While our approaches to addressing large movements of migrants and refugees may differ, reflecting our differing national realities,

capabilities, policies and priorities, the General Assembly is the forum for Member States to discuss this key issue with a view to finding durable solutions to this challenge.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 130?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.